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# Newfoundland



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# Newfoundland

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In 1949 Newfoundland, Britain's first overseas colony, joined Confederation and became Canada's youngest province. Situated in the North Atlantic, occupying the most easterly portion of the North American land mass, the province is made up of two distinct geographical entities. The island of Newfoundland, which forms the southern and eastern portion of the province, is a large triangular-shaped area of some 112,000 square kilometres, separated from the Canadian mainland by the 18-kilometre expanse of the Strait of Belle Isle in the north and by the wider Cabot Strait in the south. Labrador, the mainland portion of the province, is approximately two and a half times as large as the island.

#### *Geography and climate*

The interior of both Labrador and Newfoundland has a rolling, rugged topography, deeply etched by glacial activity and broken by lakes and swift-flowing rivers. Much of the island and southern and central Labrador is covered by a thick boreal forest of black spruce and balsam fir intermixed with birch, tamarack and balsam poplar. Northern Labrador is largely devoid of forest and is distinguished by the spectacular Torngat Mountains which rise abruptly from the sea to heights of up to 1,676 metres. The varied and scenic coastline of the island of Newfoundland, with its bold headlands, deep fiords and countless small coves

and offshore islands, forms the basis for two national parks. Additional parks are planned for Labrador.

Newfoundland's climate can be best described as moderate and maritime. The island, warmed by the Gulf Stream in the south, and bounded by the Labrador Current in the north, enjoys winters that are surprisingly mild by Canadian standards, though with a high rate of precipitation. Labrador, by comparison, has the cold winters and brief warm summers characteristic of the Canadian middle north.

#### *History*

In 1960, archaeologist Helge Ingstad's discovery of an abandoned Norse settlement in northern Newfoundland confirmed scholarly speculation that the Norse had visited and inhabited Newfoundland about 1000 A.D. The remains of eight sod-and-wood structures, a forge and workshops from the eleventh century, which confirm the Norse presence, constitute the earliest known European structures in North America. L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Park, in which the site is located, has been named to the World Heritage List by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Newfoundland was rediscovered in 1497 by John Cabot, a Genoese sailor who had been commissioned by King Henry VII of England to search for a new route to the riches of the east.



Cabot reported that the waters around Newfoundland were teeming with fish. By the mid-1500s large fleets of English, French, Portuguese and Spanish ships were fishing in Newfoundland waters.

Although the fishing ships of various nations probably maintained shore facilities and left overwintering crews in Newfoundland from the early 1500s onward, the land was regarded largely as a convenience for the migratory fishery and was not officially claimed until 1583, when Sir Humphrey Gilbert visited St. John's and took possession of Newfoundland for Queen Elizabeth I of England. While unofficial settlement was well established by the mid-sixteenth century, official attempts at colonization, largely unsuccessful, did not begin until 1610. Official colonization by the French did not occur until 1662, with the establishment of a settlement at Placentia.

Hostilities between France and England spread to the New World in 1692 and St. John's, the main English settlement in Newfoundland, was captured by the French in 1696 and again in 1708. By the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713 France relinquished to England all her rights in Newfoundland, except to St. Pierre. Nevertheless, Newfoundland continued to be a centre of conflict in the more or less continuous English-French and English-American Wars until the early part of the nineteenth century.

During the seventeenth century, powerful fishing interests from England's "West Country" succeeded in convincing the British Crown to enact harsh laws aimed at discouraging the settlement of Newfoundland. These West Country merchants feared that a resident population of independent Newfoundland fishermen would seriously weaken their monopoly. The wars of the seventeenth century disrupted the English fishery in Newfoundland and in the latter part of the century, a rapid increase occurred in the resident population. By the time the anti-settlement laws were finally repealed in 1824, Newfoundland's population was well in excess of 50,000.

Throughout most of the nineteenth century the Newfoundland economy thrived on the twin resources of the cod fishery and the annual seal hunt. Representative government was granted in 1832 and responsible government was extended in 1855. Many of the most impressive buildings of present-day Newfoundland were constructed during the prosperous years of the early and middle 1800s.

During the late 1800s, however, the economy began to diversify. The cross-island railroad, begun in 1881, was completed in 1898; saw-milling became an important industry in central Newfoundland; large-scale mining developments began at Bell Island and in the Notre Dame Bay area, and indigenous manufacturing flourished on

the basis of the colony's growing population. The construction of giant newsprint complexes, at Grand Falls in 1909 and Corner Brook in 1925, firmly established the economic base for the central and western areas of the island.

The world-wide economic collapse that marked the advent of the Great Depression virtually wiped out the export markets for Newfoundland's resource-oriented economy. The necessity to provide government relief to large numbers of the population and a sharp decline in government revenues led the Government of Newfoundland to vote to suspend its Dominion status within the Commonwealth in favour of a Commission of Government made up of officials appointed from Newfoundland and Britain.

The First World War brought renewed prosperity to Newfoundland. World markets for Newfoundland products improved dramatically during the war and this, coupled with the construction of Canadian and American military bases in Newfoundland and Labrador, resulted in full employment and rapid increases in earned incomes.

After the war the political movement for the restoration of self-government gained increasing strength and, in June 1948, a referendum was held to determine whether Newfoundland should retain the Commission of Government, restore responsible government or join the Canadian Confederation. When none of these three

options achieved a clear majority, a second referendum was held with the least popular option, retaining the Commission of Government, being dropped from the ballot paper. On this occasion, the vote in favour of Confederation was narrowly successful and Newfoundland became Canada's newest province just before midnight on March 31, 1949.

#### *The economy*

Newfoundland's economy since 1949 has continued to be dominated by the resource sectors. The giant newsprint mills at Corner Brook and Grand Falls have undergone continual modernization and technological innovation and now have a production capacity of more than 700,000 tons of newsprint a year. The construction of a linerboard mill at Stephenville provided further expansion in the forest industry. The plant is now undergoing conversion to a newsprint facility.

Newfoundland's economic development owes a great deal to the growth of the mining sector: it now provides the province's most important export in value terms. Since Confederation, mines on the island have produced copper, lead, zinc, silver, gold, cadmium, iron ore, fluorspar, pyrophyllite, asbestos, silica, gypsum and limestone. The importance of these has been largely overshadowed, however, by the development of the high-grade ore resources of the Labrador Trough,

which were first investigated in the nineteenth century. Continuing exploration revealed the presence of huge deposits of high-grade iron ore straddling the Quebec-Labrador border in the area of Knob Lake. In 1947, rapidly expanding markets for steel and the expectation of diminishing world reserves of iron ore resulted in a decision to bring the area into production. By 1954, when the mines came into production, a new town had been erected at Schefferville, Quebec; a major hydroelectric station had been built at Menihek Lake, Newfoundland; and a 565-kilometre, high-capacity railroad had been constructed between the mines and the port of Sept Îles.

During the 1950s, research into the refining of iron ore resulted in the development of new procedures allowing the utilization, through a process of enrichment, of lower-grade ores. These advances led to increasing interest in the immense deposits of low-grade iron ore in west central Labrador. In the mid-1960s, large new mines were established at Wabush and Labrador City. Since that time, the mines and pelletizing facilities at Labrador City have undergone several expansion programs so that, by the 1970s, more than half of Canada's output of iron ore was being produced in western Labrador.

Newfoundland, and more particularly Labrador, still contains large reserves of undeveloped mineral wealth. In addition, the hydro-carbon

potential of the continental shelf surrounding the south and east coast of Newfoundland and Labrador has recently attracted considerable interest. This continental shelf covers an area of 932,000 square kilometres — more than twice the land area of the province. Active exploration began in 1965 and has been recently stepped up in response to rising oil prices, impending world shortages and interesting discoveries of natural gas in the Labrador Sea. Hopes for large-scale commercial production have been heightened by the discovery in 1979 of a deposit of high-quality crude oil on the southeastern Grand Banks.

Newfoundland is also rich in another form of energy — water power — with most of the electric energy consumed in the province being generated by the numerous swift flowing rivers and natural reservoirs that characterize the island. The availability of large quantities of electric power at low cost has encouraged the growth of energy-intensive industries such as pulp and paper, oil refining, and the electric reduction of phosphate ore.

While numerous hydroelectric developments took place on the island during the 1960s and 1970s, the most impressive was the development of the massive power potential on the Churchill River in central Labrador. The project, completed in 1974, was the largest construction project in Canadian history and was, at the time of its



completion, the most expensive project to be undertaken by private industry anywhere in the world. Most of the power generated by Churchill Falls is sold to Hydro Quebec and the development is an important supplier of electricity to eastern Canada. Meanwhile, considerable hydroelectric power remains to be developed in Labrador — notably at Gull Island Rapids and Muskrat Falls on the Lower Churchill River. Some of this may eventually be transmitted to the island through the construction of a tunnel under the Strait of Belle Isle.

Despite relative growth in other resource sectors, the fisheries continue to form the backbone of the over-all provincial economy. Until the 1930s the Newfoundland fishery was based almost entirely upon a single product, salt cod, which was marketed throughout the "hot countries" of the Mediterranean, the West Indies, and South America. Then, in 1937, the first side trawlers based in Newfoundland ports went into operation and in the following year the country's first fresh-frozen fish plant came into production. By the mid-1950s salt cod production had been largely displaced by the production of fresh-frozen products intended for the American market. The necessity of ensuring a steady supply of raw material to the processing plants encouraged the growth of offshore harvesting, which made use of previously

under-utilized species such as redfish, haddock, and flatfish, not normally found in inshore waters.

The 1950s and 1960s were marked by a very rapid build-up of foreign fleets fishing on the offshore banks surrounding Newfoundland. The result, after 1968, was a noticeable decline in the catches made by both Newfoundland and foreign vessels. By 1974, it was obvious that the fish stocks off Canada's east coast had been seriously depleted and, in January 1977, Canada implemented extended fisheries jurisdiction which provided control over fish stocks and fishing activity within 200 miles (320 kilometres) of the coast. The revival of fish stocks now taking place holds considerable potential for increasing food supplies, and with it, employment and incomes in the fishing industry.

With only scattered pockets of soil on the island, agricultural production is limited. There are only 400 "full-time" farms in the province. Since the 1950s, however, the island has produced much of its own fresh milk, and hog and poultry farming is widespread throughout the Avalon peninsula. Successful crops include turnips, cabbage, potatoes, hay, pasture and berry crops.

#### *Population and settlement*

The province's present population of 575,000 is largely descended from settlers from southwestern England and

southern Ireland who immigrated to Newfoundland in the late 1700s and early 1800s. The pattern of settlement was largely determined by the fishing industry and this early population distribution has persisted. The Avalon Peninsula and northeastern Newfoundland, the traditional base for the fisheries, continue to be the most heavily populated.

St. John's, the historic commercial centre and capital of the island, is the province's largest city, with a population of approximately 146,500. The graceful charm of the older parts of the city, looking down on the harbour filled with the fishing fleets of foreign nations, contrasts sharply with the government, business and retail complexes in the newer areas. The city also houses the new campus of Memorial University, established in 1925 and now having an enrolment of more than 10,000 students.

The major centres of Grand Falls, Windsor and Corner Brook are based firmly upon the newsprint complexes located there. The smaller communities called outports remain, nevertheless, a major element in Newfoundland society. Most Newfoundland outports are set in sheltered inlets out of reach of the fierce storms which attack the coasts. Several are accessible only by boat.

The typical outport has at least one church, a school, a store, possibly a supermarket and probably a post office. Many have a fish-processing plant

and a government wharf. During the 1950s and 1960s it seemed that outport life was doomed, particularly in the more remote areas and on the islands. However, now that the fishery has been revitalized, some of the abandoned outports are being reoccupied.

The twin towns of Labrador City and Wabush, which together form the largest urbanized community of Labrador, are based on the iron-ore mining industries of the area.

### *Arts and culture*

Newfoundlanders are known as storytellers, entertainers and musicians. Ballads of the British Isles, forgotten elsewhere, are still preserved in Newfoundland. Traditions like mummering — dressing up in masks and costumes to enact old stories at Halloween and Christmas — were observed by the whole population and have only recently fallen into disuse. Outport dances once attracted whole communities with lively jigs performed to the sounds of fiddling or accordion-playing. The old art of story-telling has never died out and has perhaps been responsible for the articulate performances of groups such as the Mummers Troupe and Codco, whose satirical reviews have delighted audiences across Canada and abroad. Arts and cultural centres are to be found in all the major centres.

The serenity of life outside the major centres has provided an ideal working atmosphere for many painters

and writers. Christopher Pratt and his wife Mary, now living on St. Mary's Bay, are among Canada's most respected painters, as is David Blackwood, who is best known for his gaunt etchings of the Newfoundland seal hunt of years ago. Harold Horwood, a writer of fiction whose interest in his native province and its natural life led him to write both non-fiction and novels about the Newfoundland environment, is an admired and popular author. E. J. Pratt, whose poetry has been described as Canada's greatest achievement in verse, has written about the power of nature. Another celebrated Newfoundlander, Gordon Pinsent, is a novelist, playwright and actor.

#### *Leisure and recreation*

Recreation facilities are liberally distributed throughout the province, available to everyone interested. Lovers of the outdoors can now reach, by paved highway, the hundreds of picturesque outposts that dot the rugged Newfoundland coastline. Camping facilities are available at the provincial parks scattered throughout the province and at the two national parks, Terra Nova in eastern Newfoundland and spectacular Gros Morne in the west. Modern hotel and motel facilities are located in the major towns and at strategic locations along the major highways.

Tourists and residents alike take pleasure in Newfoundland's varied scenery, spectacular coastline and unique fishing villages. Thousands of unpolluted lakes and ponds and the sheltered waters of the deep, almost landlocked bays provide opportunity for boating and water sports. The fresh water lakes and streams also offer excellent trout fishing, while the fighting Atlantic salmon can be found in more than 100 scheduled rivers. In addition, the salt water fishermen can jig for cod or troll for the giant bluefin tuna. Excellent hunting is available throughout the province for moose, caribou and black bear, while grouse, hares, and the wily willow ptarmigan are abundant.

#### *Newfoundland's heritage*

In 1966 a handful of people concerned about the threatened demolition of a small Anglican church built in the 1840s formed the Newfoundland Historic Trust. Along with the mounting pressures for growth and change, there is an intense interest in Newfoundland's own history. The battle for heritage conservation has led to the identification of historic sites and buildings, the development of protective legislation and the appointment of citizen advisory groups to act as guardians of Newfoundland's heritage. This renaissance in the rich folklore

inheritance of Newfoundland has encouraged intensive study of the Newfoundland dialects, customs, narratives, music and song, folk plays and folk life. The folklore program of Memorial University is particularly worthy of note.

Both Newfoundland's past and its future are tied to the sea. It is from the sea that the province's vigorous traditions evolved, and it is from the sea that her future economic prosperity promises to come.











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